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Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/C.2/51/L.10)

1. Ms. CHAVES (Costa Rica) introduced, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, draft resolution A/C.2/51/L.10, entitled "Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa".

2. The Group, while welcoming the entry into force on 26 December 1996 of the Convention to Combat Desertification, emphasized the importance of more countries taking appropriate action for the ratification, acceptance or approval of or accession to the Convention.

3. In anticipation of the first Conference of the Parties, to be held in Italy in October 1997, the Group highlighted the importance of the provision of adequate financial support to help all developing countries affected by desertification to participate fully in the negotiating process and in the sessions of the Conference and its subsidiary bodies, and emphasized the important role of the interim secretariat of the Convention in that regard.

4. Additionally, the Group urged all States, the United Nations system, including international financial institutions and all other relevant organizations and actors, to take concrete actions and measures for the full and effective implementation of the provisions of Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee resolution 5/1.

AGENDA ITEM 96: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/59, A/51/73, A/51/87, A/51/120, A/51/127, A/51/138, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/295, A/51/314, A/51/357, A/51/375, A/51/462-S/1996/831 and A/51/529)

(f) ERADICATION OF POVERTY (A/51/443)

(g) CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (A/51/211-S/1996/551 and A/51/451)

5. Mr. JALLOW (Gambia) said that the eradication of poverty was fundamental to the strengthening of international peace and security and the attainment of sustainable development. However, despite significant gains over the past three decades, some 20 per cent of the world's people continued to live in abject poverty. Most of them, the majority of whom were women, lived in rural areas of the developing world.

6. In recognition of the fact that such a situation was unacceptable, world leaders had met in March 1995 in Copenhagen at the World Summit for Social Development and had renewed their commitment to the goal of the eradication of world poverty as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of

mankind. The General Assembly, for its part, had declared 1996 the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and had proclaimed the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006).

7. Well before the World Summit, the Gambia had formulated a strategy for poverty alleviation aimed at protecting the most vulnerable groups in society. The strategy had met with a positive reaction on the part of the international community. In line with the goals of the Summit and within the context of sustainable development, the Gambia had continued to improve the quality of its social services and equip itself with appropriate infrastructure, and had undertaken civic education programmes geared towards empowering people to take control of the means of escaping poverty.

8. Conscious of the fact that poverty was a multifaceted phenomenon, the Gambia had understood that it was necessary not only to raise incomes and living standards but also to change behaviour and attitudes at the individual and community levels with regard to production and social life.

9. For each country to attain sustainable growth and development, poverty alleviation strategy should be properly coordinated and at the same time be intimately linked to national development programmes.

10. At the global level that would require a concerted effort, in a genuine spirit of cooperation and partnership between developing and developed countries, to create an enabling international environment and enhance the integration of the least developed countries in the global economy.

11. Mr. KELL (UNCTAD) said that UNCTAD had been considering the question of the integration of the least developed countries in the world economy since 1995, as well as the question of the demarginalization of the most vulnerable social groups within those countries.

12. In the context of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, in April 1996 UNCTAD had organized at Geneva, with the support of the Swiss Government, an inter-agency seminar on the impact of international economic relations on poverty.

13. The rapid liberalization of international trade, the growth in direct foreign investment and the changes in world capital flows had had an impact on poverty alleviation in developing countries.

14. Economic globalization should result in a net reduction in absolute poverty at the global level since the development of international trade stimulated the development of unskilled export-oriented jobs.

15. While more and more developing countries were benefiting from the increasing displacement of economic activities and the progressive elimination of trade barriers, some of them, already in a precarious situation, ran the risk of becoming increasingly marginalized.

16. Moreover, in view of the extent of the problem of poverty, the direct impact of globalization was unlikely to be apparent in relative terms, whereas

in absolute figures it was particularly evident in certain regions, including some countries in Asia.

17. Mr. AL-MUTAIRI (Kuwait) said that his country was convinced that the elimination of poverty required a sustainable economy. For the poor to become genuine partners in development in their country, they must have the means to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies influencing their lives.

18. Sustainable economic and social development was linked to protection of the environment. It provided the necessary framework for the improvement of the living standards of all, allowing sound and sustainable exploitation of natural resources.

19. The United Nations had a very important role to play in support for and assistance to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, with a view to helping them to attain the objectives of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and to implement the content of the programmes and recommendations of the United Nations world conferences held since 1990 concerning poverty eradication.

20. Kuwait emphasized the need for Governments to base their policies on the underlying causes of poverty and the needs of the population. Notwithstanding the positive development in the regional and international economic situation - establishment of economic communities, unprecedented opening up of trade - economic and social disparities between North and South were growing. In many developing countries suffering from a reduction in development aid offered by developed countries, poverty was spreading, as were disease and illiteracy.

21. Developed countries had particular responsibilities in the context of international cooperation, the keystone of which was assistance to least developed countries. Measures should be taken to allow the poor access to the resources that would enable them to escape from poverty. All should enjoy economic and social coverage sufficient to be able to participate fully in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their country.

22. Mr. HAPSORO (Indonesia) said that his country fully endorsed the theme proposed by the Secretary-General for the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. Notwithstanding the commitments made and the strategies adopted, the ranks of the poor continued to swell in the face of widespread indifference.

23. Indonesia was pleased that the aim of the Year was to support a long-term, sustained effort to implement fully the recommendations and measures adopted at major United Nations conferences since 1990, in particular, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

24. According to the Programme of Action adopted in Copenhagen, it was essential to develop national strategies which would provide the reference point for international support. However, it was most important to promote solidarity within countries, principally between the rich and the poor, but also between

men and women (70 per cent of those living in poverty were women), in order to empower the poor to lift themselves out of poverty.

25. Since Indonesia had been fostering a grass-roots, participatory approach, poverty had been reduced substantially there. In order to eliminate poverty entirely, his country had adopted a strategy comprising "self-propelling projects" which addressed the poorest of the poor and others who had fallen through the social safety nets. It also encouraged the more wealthy to help the poor escape from poverty.

26. His delegation fully supported the International Year and the Decade as instruments for increasing public awareness and endorsed the recommendations contained in document A/51/443 concerning the task forces and resource mobilization.

27. Mr. AL-HITTI (Iraq) said that his delegation believed that unemployment and poverty were major problems and that it was essential to mobilize resources and devise strategies to eradicate poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy. All efforts to achieve sustainable development also should be guided by the need to protect the environment.

28. However, if the goals of the United Nations in that regard were to be attained, it was necessary to alter certain harmful multilateral and bilateral practices which undermined development and aggravated poverty, in particular, the economic sanctions imposed by the Security Council.

29. As the Secretary-General had stated in the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, "[sanctions could] conflict with the development objectives of the Organization and do long-term damage to the productive capacity of the target country. They [could] have a severe effect on other countries that [were] neighbours or major economic partners of the target country".

30. There was a gap in the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the imposition of sanctions and the impact of those punitive measures on the development and population of the target country. Sanctions undermined the credibility of the United Nations because they had become an instrument of inhuman vengeance serving political ends, as in the case of the sanctions imposed on Iraq, and in fact constituted an act of genocide.

31. Mr. ELTINAY (Sudan) said that the problem of poverty affected 1.5 billion people and was continuing to grow worse. International solidarity to combat poverty was lacking and the rich countries were not demonstrating the political will required to take action in that area.

32. Poverty, with its host of attendant evils - disease, lack of access to education, drug trafficking and violence - threatened the social safety net, prevented participation in political life and undermined the productive capacity of nations.

33. The policies of the wealthy countries were the cause of poverty in the developing countries. The international community should eliminate the obstacles to the exports of the developing countries and alleviate their debt

burden. The wealthy countries should recognize that international solidarity was essential and should honour all their commitments, beginning with their undertaking to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national product for official development assistance.

34. The Sudan had adopted various measures, promulgated a number of laws and launched a series of projects to eliminate poverty. It also had undertaken a study on poverty in more than 16 of its states.

35. Development and poverty eradication went hand in hand. His delegation believed that the United Nations had a fundamental role to play in eradicating poverty in the developing countries. It was essential to follow upon the Copenhagen Declaration, the decisions adopted in Istanbul, the provisions of Agenda 21 and the resolutions of the Rio Conference.

36. Mr. KAID (Yemen) said that more than 1 billion people lived in poverty and were haunted by the spectre of death. The international community must tackle that problem, which had been the focus of a number of major United Nations conferences held in recent years, from the Rio Conference to the Istanbul Conference; the latter had reaffirmed that development must be a priority if populations mired in poverty were to be assured decent living conditions. However, the recommendations adopted at those conferences appeared to have remained a dead letter.

37. Poverty was a salient feature of contemporary society. If it was to be eradicated, sustainable development and access to new technologies were crucial. People living in poverty were marginalized in every aspect of their living. Declarations of intent were inadequate, and political will and a sense of responsibility were essential. The organizations of the United Nations system should step up their efforts, in cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions. Development could help to solve the problem of poverty. It could provide an element of security, peace and stability for the developing countries, which, despite their own efforts, faced numerous obstacles, including the decline in capital flows, limited access to markets and new technologies and protectionist measures which prevented them from exporting.

38. Yemen was one of the least developed countries and faced many problems: a lack of capital, ecological problems, economic difficulties arising from the transition from a planned economy to a market economy and the restructuring of the two parts of the country, problems which were aggravated by the liberalization of trade.

39. It was to be hoped that the international community would increase its assistance to the developing countries in the fight against poverty and that cooperation would once and for all become a reality.

40. Mr. TOURÉ (Mali) said that poverty was a complex reality affecting more than a billion people, in particular, the most vulnerable - women, children, the elderly, the handicapped and refugees - in the developing countries and the least developed countries. The analysis of poverty conducted, in particular, at the World Summit for Social Development had demonstrated the close correlation between the level of economic growth and of sustainable human development and

the degree of poverty. Indeed, poverty was rampant mainly in the rural areas of the developing countries, African countries and the least developed countries, regions characterized by a lack of infrastructures and basic services. Poverty was particularly severe on the African continent, which experienced a wide variety of epidemic and endemic diseases, a very low literacy rate, hunger and malnutrition and heavy external debt. In Mali, 72 per cent of the population lived in poverty, and the figure rose to 90 per cent in rural areas.

41. Moreover, world poverty was aggravated by such factors as hunger, malnutrition, disease, environmental degradation, conflicts, the population explosion and the adverse effects of globalization. The eradication of the scourge must be a primary objective of sustainable development. The four pillars of sustainable development were poverty eradication, the creation of jobs and sustainable living conditions, the emancipation of women and their incorporation in productive activities and the production and regeneration of the environment. Accordingly in 1994, the Government of Mali had established a social safety net and had launched a framework programme for long-term economic and financial development which focused on achieving self-sufficiency in food production, creating jobs and combating drought and desertification.

42. The number of people living in absolute poverty was continuing to grow. The effort to combat that scourge must remain a priority of the international community; concerted action was called for: adequate resources must be mobilized, the recommendations of major international conferences must be taken into account and the commitments undertaken must be effectively implemented.

43. Mr. ACHA (Peru) said that the poverty eradication strategy which his country had implemented for the last five years had three components: economic stabilization, the restoration of peace and increased social expenditure. The poorest sectors of the population had benefited most from the economic recovery which had resulted from the implementation of the first two elements. In order to ensure more effective linkage between the economic and social aspects of development policy, emphasis had been placed on production, job creation, environmental and natural resource protection, and social programmes. Political and social stability would depend on the success of the anti-poverty programmes.

44. Nearly half of Peru's population lived below the poverty line, and nearly 20 per cent lived in conditions of absolute poverty. The Government's objective was to reduce the rate of absolute poverty by half within five years. For that purpose, it planned to earmark 40 per cent of its national budget for social expenditure, and aimed to achieve an annual growth rate of 6 per cent. Large public investments would be needed in key areas such as social investment, basic infrastructure, transport, communications, production, regional development and human development in general. The basic idea was to integrate the most disadvantaged population groups into the national economy and to guarantee them equal opportunity for access to basic services, decent housing, productive employment and an adequate standard of living.

45. Peru's economic programme sought to reduce poverty levels and to guarantee economic and social justice. To that end, the Government had removed all limitations on capital movements, liberalized trade, renegotiated the country's external debt and subscribed to the Brady Plan. The goal was to achieve

economic growth and social development in a balanced manner. Sustainable development that gave rise to social reforms would be a sign of success. Economic development could not be achieved unless it was accompanied by social and human development. Therefore, one of the chief elements of the reforms introduced was education, which was the key to equity and prosperity. Accordingly, the Government had approved the construction of over 25,000 classrooms and 600 schools. Great emphasis was also placed on the advancement of women in society and in the labour market, and on the issue of family planning.

46. All of those efforts must be supported by the international community, financial institutions and the funds and programmes of the United Nations system, in a context of increased cooperation and a firmer commitment on the part of the international community.

47. Mr. ESPERI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the eradication of poverty was one of the vital objectives envisaged at recent United Nations conferences, particularly the Copenhagen Summit, at which world leaders had committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty through national action and international cooperation. The Copenhagen Programme of Action highlighted two dimensions of the problem: the development of national strategies and the definition of specific targets concerning the provision of social services. The need for international cooperation had been clearly demonstrated, and such cooperation must be provided in a comprehensive manner, particularly through investments in food production, health, education, human resources, productive employment and infrastructure. The success of the efforts undertaken also depended, to a large extent, on the creation of an enabling environment that included better trade prospects, transfers of technology and a substantial increase in available financial resources.

48. It was also important to harmonize the efforts and activities of the United Nations system, with emphasis on cooperation and interaction with the Bretton Woods institutions. It might also be useful to define development and poverty indicators by gathering and analysing information. Since poverty eradication strategies differed from one country to another, living conditions could only be improved through programmes carried out at the national level, with the support of the international community.

49. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, social indicators had improved considerably in recent years, particularly in terms of food production, reduction of the population growth rate, literacy, technical and scientific capabilities, development of infrastructure and basic services, and support for vulnerable segments of society, including the disabled, the elderly and children. Moreover, the Copenhagen Programme of Action had been incorporated into the second five-year national economic, social and cultural development plan. A bill on poverty eradication had been submitted by the President of the Republic and approved by the Parliament, and a national committee had been established to develop policy and coordinate activities, on the basis of a programme of action for the next five years. In order to succeed, such programmes required the concerted and collective endeavours of the international community. However, the unilateral actions and coercive economic measures imposed by some countries for political purposes aggravated the already critical

situation of the targeted countries. The international community should condemn and refrain from such illegal practices.

50. Mr. TALBOT (Guyana) said that the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action had been the fruit of a landmark world consensus on international and national action for the eradication of poverty, and that they acknowledged the importance of a favourable international environment. The International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty provided a suitable framework for progress towards that goal. The World Food Summit, which would be held shortly in Rome, would make an important contribution to current efforts by addressing the problems of hunger and food insecurity, which were both manifestations and causes of poverty.

51. The eradication of poverty was a complex undertaking that required, first of all, a thorough understanding of the situation at the domestic level and the empowerment of people living in poverty. It was estimated that over 40 per cent of Guyana's population lived below the poverty line; the Government had therefore attempted to establish realistic and measurable objectives and to design concrete plans and programmes of action to redress the situation. The country had recently completed its first human development report, as well as a national development strategy that would provide the framework for an action plan for poverty alleviation, which would need support from the United Nations system. Coordinated and targeted support would enable that plan to be translated into visible socio-economic gains for the Guyanese population.

52. However, Guyana must deal with obstacles such as debt overhang and the negative effects of structural adjustment, especially on social infrastructure. The Government had demonstrated its commitment by consistently increasing allocations to the social sector, particularly to health and education services. In 1997, 20 per cent of the national budget would be allocated to the social sector, pursuant to the 20/20 initiative, to which Guyana fully subscribed.

53. The assistance provided by the United Nations system must be based on a common understanding of the various problems and their interrelationships, and should take an integrated approach and be complemented by an enabling international environment. It was necessary to increase resource mobilization while honouring agreed official development assistance commitments and flexibly implementing debt-relief agreements.

54. Mr. ABDELLATIF (Egypt) said that poverty was one of the major problems which the international community must solve in the next century because, despite all of the efforts made in the twentieth century, that scourge had not yet been eliminated. To eradicate poverty, the international community must agree on the steps to be taken and must implement the series of measures decided upon at the World Summit for Social Development.

55. The eradication of poverty hinged on economic development, which was the vehicle for all types of development even though it was not always compatible with environmental protection and did not necessarily ensure an equitable distribution of resources. Nevertheless, to be effective, economic development must be sustainable and equitable and must create jobs and alleviate poverty, which, in the long run, would pose a threat to stability. Moreover, economic

development must go hand in hand with measures to stabilize prices at the national level, to protect consumers (particularly women and children) and to address the needs of the unemployed.

56. The fight against poverty was the responsibility of the public authorities, but the private sector, even though its contribution was at present limited, had the means to play an important role in that field, which was why action must be taken to enable it to shoulder its responsibilities by contributing to social development.

57. Some people considered it risky to lend to the poor, which explained the reluctance of banks to provide them with the small sums they needed. Initiatives on behalf of those in greatest need, in order to facilitate the granting of loans on favourable terms, must therefore be encouraged, particularly since repayment rates in some developing countries were very high.

58. There was no established method for measuring poverty. That was partly because poverty was due to a variety of factors, some of which were structural. In its World Development Report, 1996, the World Bank indicated that there was no clear definition of poverty and that all definitions involved a social judgement. It was difficult to define poverty precisely, but the most important thing was to identify its causes and its consequences for economic and social development.

59. With regard to the mobilization of the resources needed to combat poverty, he wondered whether the reduction in official development assistance would continue and whether the volume of assistance provided on favourable terms would continue to decline, as had happened recently in the case of the International Development Agency. The eradication of poverty in the world was a moral, social, political and economic necessity. Governments and the international community should do everything possible to attain that goal, which should be included in all economic and social development programmes.

60. Mr. KRASSOWSKI (Assistant Director, Division for Social Policy and Development, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), referring to the concern expressed by the Group of 77 and China that a programme should be developed as soon as possible bringing together the plans and activities of the United Nations system in the framework of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, said that information on the subject had been provided in several reports and by the representatives of a number of bodies. Numerous initiatives were being taken to give effect to the decisions on the eradication of poverty adopted at major conferences, particularly the World Summit for Social Development, and to incorporate those initiatives into a coherent framework.

61. With respect to consideration by the General Assembly of the proposals made on that subject, it was for the Member States to take the appropriate decisions. In connection with the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, for example, the intergovernmental machinery was already in place and use should be made of it.

62. Concerning the proposals and recommendations for activities to be undertaken during the Decade, mentioned in paragraphs 50 to 53 of the Secretary-General's report (A/51/443), he said that the idea of recommending a special theme for each International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and for each year of the Decade, in order to foster public awareness and thereby facilitate action, had been viewed as the only practical suggestion that could be made in order to respond to the request from the Commission for Social Development.

63. The follow-up to the progress made, the use of indicators and the compilation of data were difficult issues, but they were being addressed by the working group and the special inter-agency teams responsible for conference follow-up, by various United Nations bodies, by the United Nations Statistical Commission and by governmental bodies. The conclusions of the working group and the teams, which were to be submitted in April 1997, would constitute guidelines which would enable the United Nations system to act at the national level and would, in particular, be made available to resident representatives and coordinators and to the headquarters of the various United Nations bodies.

64. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO), introducing the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development entitled Our Creative Diversity, recalled that the Commission had been established by virtue of decisions of both the General Conference of UNESCO and the General Assembly of the United Nations, in the context of the World Decade for Cultural Development. It was responsible for presenting analyses and recommendations to UNESCO and to the United Nations, as well as to organizations of the United Nations system, for consideration by their governing bodies and secretariats, in parallel with civil society, prior to their eventual implementation.

65. In an era of change, marked by growing inequities but also by new opportunities, it was indispensable to rethink development, which in addition to embracing environmental, social and gender concerns should also recognize the cultural dimension. When UNDP had elaborated a notion of human development which covered a broad array of political, economic and social criteria, it had not included culture. Other groups such as the Brandt Commission, the South Commission, the World Commission on Environment and Development and the Commission on Global Governance had, however, evoked that aspect. The next step was to incorporate culture into development strategies. While peoples were increasingly being drawn, both through migration and through new communication technologies, into a global village, the world itself seemed to them increasingly unbalanced and incoherent, and they were turning to culture as a refuge, a protection or a means of resistance or struggle.

66. At the regional consultations held by the Commission, participants had said that development should enable people to do those things that really mattered to them and gave them economic, social and psychological security.

67. The report focused on the main interactions between culture and development, and its impact would depend on the interest shown in it by Member States and on its dissemination. For that reason, it had been decided to translate the report into many languages, since both ethical and intellectual leadership were required at the global level. Each chapter focused on a specific theme: a new global ethics emerging from a worldwide quest for shared

values; the challenges of cultural pluralism; the stimulation of human creativity; the cultural implications of the media; gender; children and young people; cultural heritage; environment; and research. In addition to the recommendations and ideas contained in the various chapters, there was also an International Agenda. Five of the Actions that it listed were to be implemented by UNESCO and were currently being considered by UNESCO member States. Five others were recommended to the United Nations and the agencies of the United Nations system: Action 2, which called on the United Nations to reinforce its developmental role by adopting more culturally sensitive development strategies; Action 3, which called on the United Nations Volunteers to reinforce their work in the area of cultural heritage; Action 7, on the protection of cultural rights as human rights; Action 8, on global ethics in global governance; and Action 9, which called for a more people-centred United Nations. While the World Commission had recommended that UNESCO take the initiative with regard to five of the Actions on the International Agenda, that Organization would also be contributing to the debate on many aspects of the other five Actions. UNESCO would endeavour to communicate the message of the report to all the agencies concerned and to play a coordinating role. That process had already begun; what now had to be done was to carry it forward as a cooperative endeavour.

68. Mr. O'CONNELL (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that several European Union Member States had contributed to the work of the World Commission on Culture and Development, for example by providing experts and financial assistance. The report had its origins in a suggestion made in 1991 that the United Nations and UNESCO should jointly establish an international commission to prepare a report on culture and development. That suggestion had been taken up that same year by the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee.

69. As far back as 1988, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the Commission, had said that development efforts often failed because the human factor was not taken into account. The reciprocal influence of culture and development was a subject which required closer attention.

70. The report's conclusions were broad in scope and his delegation would be interested in hearing the results of the preliminary examination by the executive bodes of the competent United Nations agencies and their views on possible modalities for implementation, even though the Commission believed that the report was only a first step.

71. The European Union had begun its study of the World Commission's views on the interrelationship between culture and development, and hoped that the report would maximize the benefits of development cooperation. Just as the link between development and environment had been recognized, it was necessary to integrate culture into development projects; the European Union was increasingly taking social and cultural factors into account in the planning of development cooperation activities.

72. Sweden, a member of the European Union, had offered to arrange an international conference in 1998 as part of its contribution to the follow-up to

the report of the World Commission; Stockholm would be designated the cultural capital of Europe in that year. In the meantime his delegation hoped that the report, which had raised difficult issues and addressed problems in a forthright way, would promote extensive debate.

73. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO) said that the authors of the report had given a frank account because they wished to provoke genuine debate on the very important issue of the influence of human factors on development.

74. Mr. CHIRANOND (Thailand) said that poverty posed a threat to nations' political stability and social cohesion. Poverty eradication should therefore receive priority attention. Major progress had been made towards that objective at the Copenhagen Summit. His Government had framed its fight against poverty in the context of Commitment 2 of the Copenhagen Declaration by focusing its efforts on addressing the root causes of poverty and satisfying the basic needs of all.

75. In order to eradicate poverty, his Government had drawn up an economic and social development plan focusing on human development, with particular emphasis on education, training and the need to reduce the imbalance between urban and rural areas. The plan also featured measures to decentralize economic activities, distribute social services, develop communities and develop Thailand's human resources.

76. His Majesty King Bhumibol had made significant contributions to poverty eradication through projects designed to improve medical services in rural areas and develop basic infrastructure, thereby enabling people to support themselves.

77. Regarding cultural development, his delegation commended the efforts of the World Commission on Culture and Development which had addressed the complex question of meeting cultural needs in the context of development. The prosperous East Asian countries, which had attained higher living standards than many nations in the industrial world while remaining faithful to their values, showed that culture and development were compatible. His delegation endorsed the Actions under the international agenda contained in the Commission's report (A/51/451) and considered that the international mobilization of cultural heritage volunteers should also actively involve local volunteers assigned by their own countries. Only when specifically requested by a Member State and after careful consideration should the task of organizing the new effort be entrusted to the United Nations Volunteers. With regard to Actions 5 and 6, Member States should encourage policies to promote competition and diversity in and access to the international media system. Regarding Action 7, great caution should be exercised in equating cultural rights with human rights because most Member States were multicultural and multi-ethnic.

78. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO) assured the Thai delegation that the volunteer programme and Actions 5, 6 and 7 would be handled very carefully.

79. Mr. AASS (Norway) said that the fight against poverty was a fight for peace and security. It was also a moral responsibility for the international

community. The main task of implementing strategies to eradicate poverty remained the responsibility of governments, although international assistance was also an essential element. That was especially true for the poorest countries which continued to be marginalized. The integration of the poorest countries into the world economy should therefore continue to be a priority goal of development cooperation.

80. There was little disagreement that economic growth was a prerequisite for combating poverty and that sound macroeconomic policies were prerequisites for economic growth. The challenge was to find the right balance between necessary economic adjustments and the right social policies. Equal access to education, health, land and credit for all groups in society was essential for any development process to be sustainable. In that connection, it was important to devote particular attention to women and children in a social and economic context.

81. Poverty eradication had figured prominently in all recent world conferences, in particular the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. The current challenge was to follow up what had been agreed. It was also important to underline the importance of increased support for basic social services as reflected in the 1996 Oslo Consensus on the 20/20 initiative.

82. The multilateral development system should adopt an integrated and coordinated approach for follow-up to world conferences. The follow-up to the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the implementation of the forthcoming United Nations Decade on the same theme should be in line with the commitments made at the respective world conferences.

83. Effective implementation of the international agreements reached at world conferences could be measured by the impact of such implementation at the country level. Representatives from all United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies should be encouraged to prove that the United Nations system could act in a coordinated way. That was the only way to rebuild trust in and re-establish financing for United Nations development activities.

84. Turning to the issue of cultural development, he welcomed the publication of the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development and expressed keen interest in the follow-up. Norway intended to host an international conference in September 1997 and would invite experts on culture and development to examine the report.

85. The Norwegian Government particularly supported the holistic approach taken in the report towards the understanding of problems related to culture and development. The report argued for a firm commitment to pluralism and cultural rights and reaffirmed universal human rights in differing civilizations. If globalization was an irreversible trend in world development, the challenge according to the Commission, was to ensure sustainable and human development for all while respecting the cultural dimension.

86. The question of global ethics deserved scrutiny. The international community must strive for a common understanding of basic ethical standards which were not seen as threats to cultural pluralism.

87. Noting that the report gave particular attention to indigenous peoples, he said that the United Nations had a particular responsibility to promote their rights and interests.

88. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) underlined the useful contribution made by representatives of indigenous groups to the work of the Commission. The new global ethic consisted of common values of humanity which should establish a network of principles leading to improvements in coordination of actions on the global scale.

89. Mr. AMORIM (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, said that the Community was distinguished by several features: a common language, spoken by over 200 million people on three continents; a strong ethnic and historical identity; the absence of hegemonic sentiments of any kind; the fact that its member countries were engaged in different processes of regional integration with the Community serving as a link between the regions and contributing to the openness of those processes; and a joint determination to foster cooperation for development. Based on those elements, the Heads of State and Government of the Portuguese-speaking countries had formalized the existence of the Community in Lisbon in June 1996. Founded on a linguistic and cultural identity, the Community embraced political coordination, economic and technical cooperation and trade. Its objectives were fully consistent with those of the World Decade for Cultural Development.

90. One of the objectives of the report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, was to ensure that culture received the same level of attention in the development process as the environment. He supported the references to the plurality of means of development, the criticism of the homogenization of patterns of consumption and of behaviour and the condemnation of ethnocentrism and xenophobia. The recommendations made in the report should continue to be analysed in greater detail within the Executive Board of UNESCO, which should guide that organization concerning their possible implementation.

91. The member countries of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries supported the work of UNESCO and appreciated its revitalization efforts which, they hoped, would enable it to contribute more effectively to the promotion of culture as a means of development.

92. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture, UNESCO) said that the Director-General had given his full support to the report of the Commission. UNESCO was implementing a new programme of cultural integration. Measures must be taken to combat the xenophobic and racist tendencies that were evident in some countries.

93. Ms. AMOAH (Ghana) said that more than 1 billion people were living under unacceptable conditions of poverty. In view of the urgency of the problem, Governments and the international community had made poverty eradication a development priority. Governments everywhere were implementing policies aimed at promoting economic self-sufficiency and at providing social services in order to improve the conditions of the most disadvantaged. Unfortunately, inadequate financial resources had hindered the full implementation of those programmes.

94. Whatever the difficulties they faced, Governments must nevertheless continue their efforts to combat poverty in order to fulfil their obligations to their people. However, due to the complex and multidimensional nature of the problem and to various external constraints, developing countries could not eradicate poverty on their own.

95. The United Nations and the international community had indicated their commitment to poverty eradication as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative, and at the recent major conferences had initiated various strategies to tackle it. Ghana appreciated those efforts, while continuing to call for an integrated approach to the problem. However, poverty eradication also required the international community to take measures to remove structural inequities inherent in international economic and trade relations that were hampering the development efforts of developing countries.

96. No one could deny that the economic difficulties of developing countries had sometimes been aggravated by distorted policies and mismanagement on their part, but the international economic system had also been largely responsible for the growing disparities and injustices in international economic relations. In order to eradicate poverty, the international community must work towards removing the structural imbalances in the system and must implement policies aimed at the long-term transformation of the economies of developing countries.

97. Mr. CHUNG (Republic of Korea) said that culture gave meaning to development and provided human beings with ways of living together in peace and harmony with nature.

98. Since the end of the cold war the role of culture in shaping international relations and the evolution of history had given rise to great controversy. Two prominent articles exemplified that debate: one was entitled "The End of History" by F. Fukuyama, and the other "The Clash of Civilizations" by S. Huntington. According to the former, the unfolding of modern natural science had had a uniform effect on all societies. That process had guaranteed an increasing homogenization of human societies, regardless of their historical origins or cultural inheritance. In the view of Mr. Fukuyama, universal history was evolving towards liberal democracy and capitalism. On the other hand, S. Huntington believed that conflicts between civilizations would be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world. The most important conflict would occur along the cultural faultlines separating civilizations from one another. Contradicting the views of F. Fukuyama that history was evolving in one direction, S. Huntington argued that it would require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western and other civilizations. In his view, humanity was not moving towards a universal civilization but rather towards a world of different civilizations, each of which would have to learn to co-exist with the others.

99. In the light of those divergent views, it was heartening to note that the report of the World Commission encouraged a commitment by Member States to both pluralism and universally shared principles and ethics. The Commission should identify commonalities across cultures and explore how diverse cultures could coexist in harmony with each other. It could contribute to discussions on development issues by striving to define the dynamics between culture and

development, identifying the common features among cultures and striving to enhance the commitment to plural coexistence.

100. The Commission's report defined a clear vision and pertinent strategies. In the action plan of the Commission's international agenda, his delegation particularly supported the efforts to define new global ethics, design culturally sensitive development strategies, mobilize cultural heritage volunteers and fully utilize international media to further all those objectives.

101. His country knew from experience that culture and development were mutually reinforcing and enriching. Contrary to the dire predictions of some observers, the Republic of Korea was convinced that culture could be, not a source of conflict, but a constructive ingredient that could contribute to enhancing the well-being and self-realization of human beings in harmony with nature and in peace with their neighbours.

102. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director-General for Culture at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the Commission had carefully considered the various points raised by the previous speaker. Those factors should perhaps be analysed from a different perspective. History showed that clashes arose between different cultures when one culture tried to dominate the others. Therefore, respect for other cultures should be promoted. The fault lines between cultures were in constant flux because of geographic mobility and changes in attitudes, as well as rapidly growing cultural exchanges among countries.

103. Mr. CHOUINARD (Canada) said that Canada would endeavour to ensure the widest possible dissemination of the report entitled "Our Creative Diversity", produced by the World Commission, to which Canada had contributed. The document would necessarily generate a lively debate. That, in his view, was the real value of the report, which was supposed to stimulate thought. The thought process was basic in that it concerned the values which inspired humanity and on which the world's future depended. The United Nations should serve as a catalyst in that regard and help the peoples of the world to realize that their similarities and differences could exist within a framework of universal and interdependent values. An important element in the report was the need for the international community to agree to a larger role for members of civil society such as non-governmental organizations, minorities, businesses and labour unions. Canada strongly supported the efforts to include those groups in international summits and in other activities within the United Nations system.

104. Cultures were defined and perpetuated through a shared common heritage. Such a feeling of belonging was essential to a healthy culture. That was why the inclusion of the conservation of cultural heritages in development strategies should be encouraged; the success of such strategies depended on socio-cultural factors. Development assistance agencies should therefore be sensitized to that need.

105. The Commission's report should be praised because it touched upon the main concerns of the World Decade for Cultural Development. However, with the sole intent of advancing the thought process, he wished to draw attention to some

points of concern to his delegation. For example, the proposed creation of new international bodies might well duplicate existing organizations whose mandates should be strengthened instead. However, while his country had supported the idea of an early warning system to prevent incipient conflicts, it might be good to consider including certain criteria of a cultural nature in the development of such a system. One of Canada's main concerns about the report was the emphasis it put on cultural rights and the criminalization of violations of such rights. Cultural rights were set forth in a variety of instruments, but their violation was not easy to criminalize.

106. The report's success would be measured by the extent of the dialogue that it prompted and exchanges of views that it encouraged. It was from that perspective that the thought processes and consultations should be continued.

107. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director General for Culture at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), referring to the previous speaker's statement, admitted that the Commission had not had enough time to consider in detail the structures to be established in that regard. With respect to the criminalization of violations of cultural rights, such rights should be developed within the framework of fundamental human rights.

108. The globalization of culture was progressing rapidly especially as a result of the development of new information technologies. The issue of whether or not it was a permanent phenomenon should be considered further by UNESCO, which should gather much more extensive data for that purpose.

109. Mr. ELTINAY (Sudan) expressed appreciation for the World Commission's initiative in preparing a report aimed at overcoming obstacles to unity among peoples and averting cultural conflicts. Culture and development were closely intertwined and cultural pluralism was a creative force which guaranteed prosperity for any society. All countries and peoples should demonstrate a tolerance of pluralism, which strengthened the sense of identity and of belonging to a nation. Unfortunately, some Powers were trying to interfere with that social cohesion, sometimes through representatives of certain organizations thus exerting a destabilizing influence. Vigilance was also required in the face of the role played by international mass communications media.

110. As far as gender equality was concerned, Action 4 of the report seemed to overlook a very important element, namely, family cohesion, which in turn formed the basis of social cohesion. That was a shortcoming which should be remedied.

111. With respect to global ethics, all cultures and religions had adopted certain common principles based on cooperation between human beings. A lack of interaction would only aggravate disparities between the rich and the poor as well as conflicts. However, it was deplorable that certain countries, while refusing to recognize diversity, disparaged the civilizations of other countries and deprived them of the right to development, which was an integral component of human rights. The United Nations must therefore be strengthened so that it could really work towards achieving the unity and solidarity of peoples, in line with the Charter. The United Nations system, particularly UNESCO, had an important role to play in that regard.

112. Ms. ARIZPE (Assistant Director General for Culture at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that unity among human beings was a first step towards global ethics. All societies had established basic structures which constituted platforms uniting individuals. The term "civilization" was no longer used in anthropology because it implied the establishment of a hierarchy; it clashed with the notion of democracy advocated by the authors of the report and had been replaced by the notion of "culture". As far as the promotion of gender equality was concerned, it was true that it amounted to promoting the family, especially blood ties and equitable community relations that permitted the establishment of genuine solidarity and closed the gaps between the rich and the poor.

113. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda items 96 (f) and 96 (g).

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.